

# Mental Health Liaison Group

September 4, 2003

The Honorable Norm Coleman  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jim Ramstad  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Coleman and Representative Ramstad:

We the undersigned organizations are writing to support the HEART Act, Help Expand Access to Recovery and Treatment Act of 2003 (S.1138/ H.R.2256).

This bill would end the long-standing discrimination in group health plans (as well as plans in the individual market) against individuals in need of treatment for alcohol and substance use disorders.

Our support for the HEART Act should in no way be construed as diminishing our strong support for the Senator Paul Wellstone Mental Health Equitable Treatment Act, MHETA (S.486/ H.R. 953). Rather, we view HEART as filling in some of the gaps in MHETA.

Mental health and alcohol and substance use disorders are inextricably linked. Indeed the prevalence of co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders and the emphasis on integrated care of those disorders argues forcefully for the importance of providing coverage for the full range of mental health and substances use disorders.

While this bill would not require employers to purchase a substance use disorder benefit, it would assure that if offered, it would be on par with the medical-surgical benefit.

The SAMHSA's 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (SMA-02-3758) indicates that 16 million Americans either abuse or are dependent on alcohol and other substances. Most are employed but are unable to receive adequate treatment due to poor benefit design. Enactment of HEART would be an important step in correcting this problem.

Cost must be evaluated against the cost of not treating. Alcohol and substance use disorders cost America \$294 billion a year according to a 10-year substance abuse treatment expenditure study released by SAMHSA (SMA-01-3511). The same study indicates that the private sector expenditures are in negative growth while cost shifting to the taxpayer has soared. Total annual treatment expenditures are \$12 billion.

According to the National Governors Association (2002) government now pays 64% of the treatment

National organizations representing consumers, family members, advocates, professionals and providers  
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expenditures while the private sector pays 24%. This is a direct result of the lack of parity in benefit design.

History has shown that discrimination by diagnosis does not render effective healthcare. This stigma needs to be eradicated. We are looking forward to working with you in order to enact the HEART Act.

Sincerely yours,

Alliance for Children and Families  
American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry  
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work  
American Association of Pastoral Counselors  
American Counseling Association  
American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychiatric Nurses Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Society of Clinical Psychopharmacology  
Association for the Advancement of Psychology  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
Child Welfare League of America  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
Federation of Behavioral, Psychological & Cognitive Sciences  
Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services  
International Society of Psychiatric Mental-Health Nurses  
NAADAC The Association for Addiction Professionals  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill  
National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders -- ANAD  
National Association of County Behavioral Health Directors  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Coalition of Mental Health Consumers and Professionals  
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare  
National Foundation for Depressive Illness  
National Mental Health Association  
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA  
Tourette Syndrome Association